

critical digest

Vol. II No. 40

July 24, 1950

The Weekly That Keeps You Informed of the Current Broadway Critical Scene

Festival Repertory Theatre Opens in N.Y.

Parisienne-Fulton, 7/24/50. First two week production of Sam Wanamaker and Teresa Hayden's extensive "Festival Theatre" plan opens in New York starring Faye Emerson, Francis Lederer, Romney Brent and Helmut Dantine in an Ashley Duke's adaptation of Henri Becque's French play. Mr. Wanamaker directs.

Third Brena Show Viewed by Daily Critics

The Medium & The Telephone-Arena, Hotel Edison, 7/19/50. First arena style opera hit the critical jackpot for Heilwell and Lynn-Thomas. Daily critics sounded bravos. Zelma George in the title role of The Medium of the revival of this Gian Carlo Menotti twin bill. Edith Gordon received praise for her work in The Telephone. Music and drama critics alike praised the new star. Watt, News, doubted if her effective screaming could be classified as singing. The News sent three critics, including one to cover the eating facilities. Evelyn Keller and Leo Coleman of the original cast also won good notices. Musical accompaniment by William McDermott and Leonard Kastle received compliments. Two critics noted that their pianos needed tuning. Sole dissenter was Bolton of the Morning Telegraph who just doesn't like theatre-in-the-round. But he does think Miss George is wonderful. Author Menotti was credited with a fine staging job, but Sylvester, News, thinks designer William Riva should receive the bouquets.

Reviewers Rate Prize Winner

Robert Penn Warren's much heralded All the King's Men was revived by the President Players at the President Theatre. Willis Knighton's turntable sets and slide projection scenery drew top interest. Sylvester, News, and Garland, Journal-American thought they were effective. Others thought they just got in the way. Opinions varied as to the quality of production and acting, not one raved. Steve Gravers played the leading role of Willie Stark, with Doe Avedon, Dan Matthews and Al Henderson supporting. Several critics commented on the extreme heat of the theatre. Most liked book and picture better than the play.

Summer Theatre Tryouts

Garson Kanin's The Live Wire, which Mike Todd will present in New York August 3, was billed as a mildly entertaining comedy by Don, Variety, at its Quinquit, Maine premiere. Author-director was urged to tone down some of the overplaying...Aurand Davis' And Never Been Kissed debut at Westboro, Massachusetts, was deemed much too mild a comedy for serious professional interest by Lee, Variety...Duxbury, Massachusetts attempt at musical, Open Season, was panned by Variety critics...Laurence Langner's Life of the Party, tried out in Westport was considered a good title for a bad play, by Elam, Variety. Critic thought show by Theatre Guild head lacked entertainment and preaching values.

Checking the Ads

Misquoting the critics in display ads is contagious. Even Off Broadway groups fall victim to this malpractice. Circle Theatre's The Doctored Wife was panned by the critics for being a bore. The only thing they found to praise was the attractive prop girls. But that was enough for a display ad. "Spirit and Enthusiasm - Watts, Post," reads the ad. The critic was writing about the way the prop girls moved the furniture, not the French charade in the round.

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* The Green Room Department *
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STATE OF CRITICS...Watts, Post, feels there is something lacking in the present crop of drama critics. Though they are adequate advisers to the public, they lack the prestige of Wolcott, Broun and Hammond. Post critic thinks answer lies partly in a decline in interest in the stage. But it is mostly due to certain frailties of the present critics in both showmanship and personality.

ANTI ANTA...Aims of American National Theatre and Academy were not realized by production of Shaw's Getting Married by an all British cast, comments Winchell. Columnist reminds that ANTA was set up to encourage American theatre. Shaw revival folded in Los Angeles and will not be brought to ANTA Playhouse.

FREE LUNCH...Gilmore's Steak House, NYC, will provide free lunches to a young actress now appearing in summer stock. The lucky girl, who must be judged "promising" by Lynne Gilmore, Flora Robson and John Wildberg will get publicity and lunch for a year. Rice, Post, was skeptical that story was publicity stunt, but he is convinced it is the right kind of publicity.

MOVIE STAR PANDED...Shelley Winters, cinema glamour girl now making strawhat rounds in Born Yesterday, was warned by MBS Radio Harris that fits of temperament don't spell success in legitimate field. Two summer theatre managements complained to the radio commentator about Winters' poor performance and temper.

CRITIC'S PLACE...Critics must remain impartial. They certainly shouldn't join forces with the advertising profession. This was comment of Gould, Times, when he first saw World-Telegram & Sun Radio & TV editor Harriet Van Horne giving the cigarette commercial on NBC TV Leave it to the Girls. Gould thought this was equal to finding Brooks Atkinson peddling programs in the lobby.

TWO-FOR-ONES...Case in favor of "two-for-one" low priced tickets was presented by Sylvester, News. Though looked down by many, these tickets are used by many hard headed producers to good advantage. The original production of The Medicine & The Telephone was saved by offering cut rate tickets to music students, teachers, etc.

ADS IN THEATRE...Fear of commercials in the theatre was expressed by English actor Grey Blake in note to Times Drama Mailbag. Recent backing of Call Me Madam by RCA could possibly have dire consequences. Ethel Merman may be forced to sing attributes of beer during intermission, or sing a salesmanager's ditty in the finale.

ENGLISH ACTING...Clurman, New Republic, was very much impressed during his London visit with the ability of the English actor. He considers his contained theatricality an asset. The English star gets more of a chance to follow his profession, while the American star wastes much of his time waiting for suitable contracts.

CENTRAL STAGING...Though critics have definite ideas on what can and cannot be done arena style, Margo Jones, director of Theatre 50 and leading force in new theatre movement, sees no such limitations. Article in Times states that any play can be presented via theatre-in-the-round. The secret lies in simplifying the script, the props, and the action as much as possible.

* News & Notes *
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World-Telegram & Sun strike continues into seventh week. Cio Guild program continues nightly...Boris Karloff subs for sports commentator Bill Stern July 21 on NBC.. Gertrude Lawrence will transcribe excerpts from The Glass Menagerie for Decca...Richard Whorf and Nancy Kelly have been named to cast of Wolcott Gibbs Season in the Sun...Garland, Journal-American, receives "nasty" notes from Anne Jeffreys' mother if he criticizes her...INS Bob Considine don't understand how the critics can write honest reviews after they have been tempted on opening night by Stork dinners and Cadillacs to the theatre.

' Summer Theatres '

"Q" Productions third show at the Hotel Sutton was Paul William's Belgian fantasy The Fine Old Wine of Monsieur Muche. Pollock, Compass, thought play and acting was just plain terrible. But Francis, Billboard, thought group has improved 100 percent, though play was a bit of repetitious nonsense. Trade paper critic suggested group spend efforts on home-grown product instead of foreign adaptations...Repertory Theatre's revival of Birabeau's Dame Nature was greeted as refreshing Off Broadway theatre by Morec, Billboard, and Pollock. Sylvie Franco won acting honors, while Alan Masters was credited with a presentable job in a difficult role...Ivan Becker's Etched in Granite premiered by Originals Only at their Ninth Street Playhouse was enjoyed by Pihodna, Herald-Tribune. New playwright shows much promise, though script in question needed editing. No admission is charged by group, hat is passed during intermission. Smoking is allowed.

Rice, Post, made a week end visit to two Maryland theatres. Both shows were good. At Richard Skinner's Olney Theatre, he found Stuart Erwin as a wonderful Elwood P. Dowd in Harvey, though Stephen Eliot was badly miscast as the male nurse. Idiot's Delight was the revival packing them in at Lutherville's Hilltop Theatre managed by Don Swann, Jr. Katherine Sergava and Morton Da Costa co-starred...Grist Mill Playhouse, Andover, New Jersey, featured Nita Naldi and James Newell in a first rate production of On the Town, according to Garland, Journal-American. He did think the pianists played too loud.

' Interview Round Up '

GEORGE BRANDT...Subway circuit producer is the most extraordinary and prolific producer on Broadway in the opinion of Coleman, Mirror. Screen writer and producer in his teens. He joined forces with J.J. Leventhal in his early 20s. His plans for next season include working with a trio of producers on Broadway and tour shows.

IRVING CAHN...Drama editor of Host, New York hotel weekly, voiced his opinion on a standard Broadway controversy on MBS Sardis. He thinks South Pacific will break all records for long run musicals. But he thinks Showboat had better music.

IRWIN KRAMER...Edison Hotel vice president told Rice, Post, how much he enjoys having the Arena Theatre in his ballroom. First and foremost he is stagestruck. Secondly with both the band and banquet business in a slump, theatre-in-the-round has boosted both the food and liquor take of the hotel dining room.

EDWARD ARNOLD...Screen star now making tour of summer theatres can't take theatre seriously. Once you do, he revealed to WCR Martha Deane, you are licked. It is best to act with tongue in cheek.

ZELMA GEORGE...New star of The Medium detailed some of her diverse interests to Pollock, Compass. Compiler of Negro American music for Rockefeller Foundation, student for Ph.D. in Sociology at N.Y.U. Civil Service administrative worker in Cleveland, are only a few of her interests. She first played title role of operetta at Cleveland's Karamu Theatre with Gilpin Players.

HENRY SHEREK...British producer of The Cocktail Party told WCBS Bill Leonard what he thinks is right with American theatres. It is the best in the world, has the best musicals and the best "red, hot and blue" dramas. Without American plays, the British theatre would be far less interesting.

' Random Items '

Sally Deutsch has been named editor of Theatre Arts...Walter Kerr, newly named critic of Commonweal, is making his permanent home in Westchester...Sidney Fields, Mirror columnist, is subbing for WNBC Hi Jimx.

Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommended the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening.

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| 1. NY Times | 11. Newark News | 21. Catholic World |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune | 12. Women's Wear Daily | 22. Commonweal |
| 3. NY News | 13. Daily Worker | 23. Cue |
| 4. NY Mirror | 14. Wall Street Journal | 24. Chr.Sci.Monitor |
| 5. NY Compass (PM, Star) | 15. Journal of Commerce | 25. Sat.Review Lit. |
| 6. NY Post | 16. George Jean Nathan | 26. Newsweek |
| 7. NY Sun (Morehouse) | 17. Morning Telegraph | 27. Time |
| 8. NY Journal-American | 18. Variety | 28. Nation |
| 9. NY World Telegram and Sun | 19. Billboard | 29. New Republic |
| 10. Brooklyn Eagle | 20. Theatre Arts | 30. New Yorker |

The Cocktail Party-Miller, 1/2/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 2-9-14-22-25-29.
So-So: 16-30. None: 13.

Come Back, Little Sheba-Booth, 2/15/50. Pro: 16 votes. Con: 2-4-7-12-21-27.
So-So: 3-6-30. None: 13-15-24-25-28.

The Consul-Barrymore, 3/15/50. Pro: 27 votes. Con: 22. So-So: 6-29.
Death of a Salesman-Morosco, 2/10/49. Pro: 28 votes. Con: 29. So-So: 27.
Detective Story-Broadhurst, 3/23/49. Pro: 21 votes. None: 5-10-11-13-16-24-28-29
Gentlemen Prefer Blondes-Ziegfeld, 12/8/49. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 6-21-28.
So-So: 16-19-22-23-27. None: 25.

The Happy Time-Plymouth, 1/24/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 5-6-7-20-26-27-28-30.
Kiss Me, Kate-Century, 12/31/48. Pro: 28 votes. Con: 29. None: 28.
The Member of the Wedding-Empire, 1/5/50. Pro: 26 Pro: Con: 16. So-So: 2-27-30.
Mister Roberts, Alvin, 2/13/48. Pro: 24 votes. Con: 21-24. So-So: 13-16-17.

Peep Show-Winter Garden, 6/28/50. Pro: 4-5-6-8-10-11-15-17-19-23.
Con: 1-2-12-26-27-28-30. So-So: 3-14-18.

Peter Pan-Imperial, 4/24/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 8-16-30. So-So: 6-14-19.
South Pacific-Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: 19 votes. Con: 27. So-So: 23.
Texas Li'l Darlin'-Hellinger, 11/25/50. Pro: 12 votes. Con: 1-4-7-8-19-19-23-29-
30. So-So: 2-5-10-11-20-26-27. None: 25-28.
Where's Charley?-St. James, 10/11/48. Pro: 16 votes. Con: 6-7-12-13-16-19-22-24-
25-26. So-So: 4-27. None: 10-28.
The Wisteria Trees-Martin Beck, 3/29/50. Pro: 15 votes. Con: 2-7-9-10-16-22-23-
25-26-27-28-30. So-So: 18-29. None: 13.

Tickets Please!-Coronet, 4/27/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 11-16-29-30. So-So: 26.

